

Do You Have Job Stress?

1. Demand

I have to work very hard.

Yes No

I am asked to do too much work.

Yes No

I do not have enough time to get my work done.

Yes No

2. Control

I have to do a lot of repetitive tasks.

Yes No

My job allows me to be creative.

Yes No

My job allows me to learn new things.

Yes No

I have a lot of say about what happens at work.

Yes No

I have a lot of freedom to decide how I do my work.

Yes No

3. Support

I work with people who are helpful to me.

Yes No

I work with people who take a personal interest in me.

Yes No

My supervisor is helpful to me.

Yes No

My supervisor cares about my welfare.

Yes No

Scoring

Calculate a separate score for each part (Demand, Control, Support). Give yourself 1 point for every YES answer and write either Low, Moderate or High for each below.

My job demands are _____.

(0 - 1 is Low; 2 - 3 is High)

My control at work is _____.

(0 - 2 is Low, 3 - 5 is High)

My support at work is _____.

(0 - 1 is Low, 2 is Moderate, 3 - 4 is High)

(Adapted from Stress at Work: A Training Workbook for Working People by the Institute of Labor and the Community, based on a questionnaire by Dr. Robert Karasek.)

Does your test score show high demand/low control/low social support? If so, beware. Research shows that stress, or even illness, can be the result when high demands are accompanied by low control (or not having a say in what you do) and low social support at work.



Things the Union Can Do About Job Stress

FIRST AND FOREMOST, GET INVOLVED IN YOUR UNION.

The union can play a very important role in helping to reduce the amount of job stress that their members experience. They are able to negotiate contract language and also promote joint labor-management initiatives for addressing workplace stress. In addition, they can:

- ▶ Meet regularly with employees to boost morale.
- ▶ Enforce contract provisions.
- ▶ Sit down with management to discuss employee concerns.
- ▶ Demand that supervisors are properly trained and experienced.
- ▶ Negotiate more training for workers.
- ▶ Negotiate better work design.
- ▶ Push harder for better safety provisions, such as good ventilation.
- ▶ Provide a complaint box for employees.
- ▶ Provide counselors for worker consultation.
- ▶ Provide stress awareness and coping skills classes for workers

Remember! It's all not in your head!

Stress management only works when the root causes of the stress have been tackled!

The AFT's Health & Safety Program is another resource for information on stress and other workplace concerns. Contact program staff at health&safety@aft.org



AFT
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

what is Workplace Stress?



A Union of Professionals



STRESS IS A PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE; WE ALL EXPERIENCE it to one degree or another. Although it is an unavoidable part of many activities at work and at home, stress becomes harmful when it reaches an intensity that impairs daily activities.

The focus of this brochure is **harmful stress** that arises from work situations, as opposed to stress that is generated by an employee's personal life.

Harmful workplace stress has been associated with:

- Jobs that demand a lot from you, while giving you little or no control over how the job is performed;
- Unsafe and/or uncomfortable work environments;
- Lack of employee participation or input in organizational practices; and
- Little social support, poor supervision or poor relations with co-workers.

Workplace stress can be very costly. It contributes to low productivity, occupational illness and injury, absenteeism, poor employee morale and high health-care costs.

Risk Factors

WE KNOW THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN CONDITIONS OR "risk factors" that contribute to stress in the workplace. The following have been identified as underlying causes of workplace stress:

- **Mismanagement:** When managers don't manage well—they are too authoritarian, disorganized or pit workers against each other—the result is often frustrated or stressed-out employees.
- **Physical Environment:** Employees are affected by things like their workplace's physical condition, degree of chaos, ventilation, lights, noise, cleanliness and temperature, to name a few.
- **Work Organization:** This includes the pace of work, variety of tasks, staffing levels, number of breaks, benefits/pay, career ladder, training availability, etc.
- **Economic Conditions:** These conditions include fears over possible job loss, downsizing, reduction of hours, loss or reduction of benefits,
- **Discrimination:** The perception of employees that they are not being treated equal can contribute to stress.

Strategies for Combating Job Stress

TO COMBAT JOB STRESS, REMEMBER:

- ◆ Job stress has multiple causes, so it has to have multiple solutions.
- ◆ Interventions with the individual worker alone will not solve the problems of workplace stress. Organizational change also must occur.

A well-designed stress reduction program addresses three levels:

- ▲ **Individual:** These strategies are designed to help the individual employee cope more effectively with stress (for example: change in diet, exercise, assertiveness training, relaxation training).
- ▲ **Small groups:** These strategies are intended to help workers develop more social support on the job and at home (for example, supervisory training, family counseling, team building, sensitivity training around racism and sexism).
- ▲ **Organizational/Structural:** These strategies are directed toward improving the conditions of work (for example, modifying shifts, reducing physical hazards,

improving career ladders, training on technology, job rotation and employee decision-making).

Suggestions on How to Manage Personal Stress

- ◆ Make a list of your expectations and how you plan to meet them.
- ◆ Rank and prioritize your problems. Take one problem at a time.
- ◆ Discuss concerns and problems with friends and people you trust.
- ◆ Exercise regularly and get enough sleep.
- ◆ Balance your day by prioritizing your tasks in the morning.
- ◆ During your work break, try to do the opposite of whatever you do at work. For example, if you sit all day, stand for a bit.
- ◆ Know when you have too much to do and ask for help.
- ◆ Share responsibilities with others. Can co-workers or others take over some of your tasks?
- ◆ Learn about the various relaxation methods available to help you ease your daily tensions.
- ◆ Seek professional help when appropriate.

In order to reduce job stress and illness risk, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) recommends the following:

- You should be doing work for which you have the proper training resources. You should have adequate breaks and more control if your tasks are very demanding.
- Jobs should be designed so that you can use your skills and develop new ones. Jobs also should be meaningful and provide stimulation for you.
- You should have a say in job-related decisions and actions.
- You should have job security and opportunities for career development.
- You should have opportunities to interact with other workers.
- Your work roles should be very clear in order to reduce role conflicts

Warning Signs

We know that stress is really the body's normal response to what are called stressors. Under

stress, the body "gears up" and reacts to a situation to protect itself. Once the stressor is removed, the body returns to its normal state. Here are some early stress symptoms you need to watch out for:

Physical

Headaches
Stomach problems
Over/Undereating
Sleep disturbances
Muscle aches and pains
Skin rashes
Teeth grinding

Psychological

Forgetfulness
Anger
Frustration
Anxiety
Depression
Irritability
Feeling powerless

Physical

High blood pressure
Heart disease
Immune system dysfunction
Asthma
Spastic Colon
Diabetes

Psychological

Serious depression
Burnout
Suicidal behavior
Alcoholism
Domestic violence
Substance abuse

Stress becomes a problem when the body is constantly under the influence of stressors, and doesn't get a chance to return to normal. Our brain and its coordinating assistants are overwhelmed and worn out. We're constantly in what scientists call a state of arousal or alertness. This can lead to long-term health problems such as: